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Iranian Women Exiles in the Netherlands
and the 1979 Revolution (2003, New York).

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From Marxist Organizations to Feminism

Iranian Women's Experiences of Revolution and Exile

Abstract : Iranian women were extremely active during

As a 13 year-old girl growing up in a secular family in Iran in 1975, I never thought of becoming either a

improvements in the condition of women could not be postponed for any reason at all. It was then that I

My past experiences have been essential in the choice of my study in anthropology and later in my choice

When politics became everything

The involvement of women in the Iranian revolution of 1979 took place at many different levels. Their m

After the revolution, scenes in the streets changed drastically, especially in front of the University of Teh

mattered was political. [Nahid](#), who lives in the United States, emphasized this point clearly: “My sister to

Those years felt like an open university both on a theoretical and practical level for many women, as so

Minoo, who was then twenty years old, now an artist living in the Netherlands, related her feelings: “The

strong self-confidence, especially in that age of being a young adult. I was thinking that I had found my

Nahid, a nineteen-year old who was the revolution, those were the best years of my life. But so many of us thought those years

For Samira, a nineteen-year old then, now living in the Netherlands, the most important aspect of those

To be a woman: Gender and politics

Those highly politicized years had a complex influence on gender relations. On the social level, those y

development: “During the time of the Shah I saw that some possibilities existed for women, but only for

Taraneh was nineteen years old then and is now living in the Netherlands. She told me that she never f

There were some differences in the way the impact on women was narrated by the women I interviewe

boundaries did not lead to an actual improvement of women’s rights in those years. There are two main

First, not long after the revolution, religious leaders started to limit women’s social mobility and abolish t

Minoo’s story illustrates this contradictory aspect of empowerment and denial of the situation of women.

On the individual level we see the same kind of contradiction between the empowerment and the denial

and we always had to keep our distance. But when I became politically active we had mixed meetings in

Few of the women expressed the [\[2\]](#) themselves in this manner. Most of them said a history of this kind of dis

Womanhood denied

In terms of denial of womanhood, the ideal revolutionary type was a very masculine figure. Women with

equality. In the mountains I carried a 40-kilo backpack intended for a boy 1.8 meters in height. Later I had

Samira mentions the same point: "It was really strange, you know, in the mountains, we as girls were supposed

To bear all that pain or physical harshness to become more like a man was one denial of womanhood. I

In the denial of their sexuality, women talked about the various ways they suppressed their sexual attraction

Moghissi also highlights this issue: "Most veteran Fedayeen [the large leftist guerilla organization of that time]

In those years, marriage had to serve political goals; otherwise, it was unnecessary. In this sense, the concept

with the boys. No, I did not feel any sexual difference. The sexual differences were not there and this was

Mojgan was very young – fifteen years old – during the revolution: “When I worked in a political organization,

Sayeh comments about this situation: “In those years there was a great atmosphere. But the problem was

The politicized atmosphere of the years of freedom gave political identity a dominant character. Other identities

When being political became a crime

Those years of freedom were beautiful, but they did not last. Years full of hope and optimism changed to

by many. In the first months after the revolution, various political groups began clashing. Although people

As discussed earlier, political identity gained precedence during the years of freedom. The political space

How did it feel to be a woman?

In the previous part, women expressed their views on the ways in which gender relations changed during

During this time, people could be attacked on the street for various reasons. One such reason was being

the women who lost their husbands during that time (now) and shock for years. Their pain became (suppressed)

Women, who experienced higher social mobility in the first years of the revolution, were faced with many

was a drastic turning point that had many social, legal, and economic consequences for women. Women

Most of the unmarried women of this study married during the period of suppression. Their choice of partner

Even when love was present, it was strongly suppressed, which Jaleh later regretted. Jaleh, then a two

we never expressed our feelings to each other and that we never had privacy to be together. It is strange

As was the case during the period of freedom, marriage was strongly connected to political considerations

“You had the time to think”

When political activity became dangerous, the amount of activity decreased drastically. Activists who had

Having so much time to think back over the reasons for their activism made people realize that their exp

Forced to limit their activities on a political level and to question their political involvement, women now

From Marxist Ideologists to Feminists

The past experiences of the women of this study changed them in many ways. They can no longer be s

children.” For many, new ideals have replaced old political ideals. What almost all of them have in com

Others seek to contribute by voluntary involvement in various human and women’s rights organizations

Most of the women in both groups conclude, there was one occasion where they attracted Sepideh, who i

The truth of Sepideh’s claim to being a feminist is manifested in her activities within different women’s o

Bitā could be considered as one of the few women who have been a feminist both in Iran and during the

Bitā talked with me extensively about the difficulties she had as a feminist in that period in Iran. Once in

Part of the experience of [\[6\]](#) Once in exile, the space was there, so that the past experience expanded. The c

Marriage challenged in exile

It is generally accepted that the process of migration changes the family structure of married couples. D

xii). This is also the case of *Dehkhoda* families in exile (Danesh, 1991: 99). [\[4\]](#) For further details see 15 year-ol

However, two circumstances are of particular interest for this study: 1) most of the women, especially th

Conclusion

The women involved in political activism in Iran experienced a shift in gender relations. The political atm

limited their activities. However, the political dominance of those years left those achievements latent. A

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Endnotes

- 1 For safety reasons and to protect the anonymity of the women interviewed
- 2 For more on these differences see Ghorashi 2003.
- 3 For further studies on the position of women after the revolution, see the following
- 4 On this point see also Darvishpour 1996, 1999; Hannasab 1991; Mahdi 1999; and

http://www.jsri.ro/old/html%20version/index/no_6/hallehghorasi-%20articol.htm
